Pittsburgh’s Lost Steamboat: History Center Exhibition Unearths the Treasures of the Arabia

-New exhibit showcases nearly 2,000 objects from the Pittsburgh-built Steamboat Arabia, which sank in the Missouri River and was rediscovered 130 years later in a Kansas cornfield-

PITTSBURGH, April 26, 2014 – The Senator John Heinz History Center will examine a fascinating story of sunken treasures, discovery, and preservation by showcasing the largest time capsule of pre-Civil War life as part of a new major exhibition, Pittsburgh’s Lost Steamboat: Treasures of the Arabia.

Built in Brownsville, Pa. and Pittsburgh in 1853, the Steamboat Arabia travelled extensively to frontier towns along the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri Rivers. The vessel’s 200 tons of cargo included more than one million objects, some as small as pickles and others as large as prefabricated homes, bound for general stores and pioneer settlements in the West. During its final journey in 1856, the Arabia hit a tree snag and sank in the Missouri River near Kansas City, Mo.

More than 130 years later, a group of modern day treasure hunters rediscovered the Arabia buried 45 feet below a cornfield a half-mile from the river. Remarkably, the anaerobic (oxygen-free) environment perfectly preserved most of the boat’s cargo – fine dishware, clothing, and even bottled food all preserved in excellent condition.

The History Center’s Pittsburgh’s Lost Steamboat: Treasures of the Arabia exhibition features nearly 2,000 once-hidden treasures, including many items manufactured in Western Pa.

The 8,000 square foot exhibit, presented in partnership with the Arabia Steamboat Museum in Kansas City, explores Pittsburgh’s important role as a Gateway to the West and a national hub for the steamboat building industry in the mid-19th century.

Additional highlights of the Treasures of the Arabia exhibit include:

- An immersive exhibit entrance where visitors can venture through a cornfield to discover some of the first artifacts unearthed from the excavation site;
- A life-size replica of the Steamboat Arabia’s 28-foot paddle wheel;
- Perfectly-preserved, 160-year-old pickles – still green in their original glass jar. The “sweet pickles” were bottled by Wells, Provost & Co. of New York and loaded on to the Steamboat Arabia in 1856, about 13 years before H.J. Heinz founded his famous ketchup and pickle company in Sharpsburg, Pa.;

-more-
• Interactive stations where young visitors can stamp their own “Build-a-Steamboat” cards and navigate through the treacherous snags of the Missouri River;
• Several Sharps Model 1853 rifles, including one that was smuggled onto the Arabia during the Kansas “free soil campaign,” a series of violent political confrontations involving anti- and pro-slavery elements leading up to the Civil War;
• A special section revealing the Hawley family’s painstaking excavation and ongoing preservation of the Arabia’s massive cargo;
• A re-creation of the Steamboat Arabia’s only casualty – a carpenter’s mule that tragically went down with the ship.

**Pittsburgh’s Lost Steamboat: Treasures of the Arabia** is the first traveling exhibition featuring items from the Arabia collection and represents the first time that the boat’s objects have returned to Western Pa. since 1853.


The exhibit is on display through Jan. 4, 2015 and is included with regular History Center admission: $15 for adults, $13 for seniors (age 62+), $6 for students and children (age 6-17), and free for children (age 5 and under).

For more information on the **Pittsburgh’s Lost Steamboat: Treasures of the Arabia** exhibit, including videos, photos, and fact sheets, please visit [www.heinzhistorycenter.org](http://www.heinzhistorycenter.org).

**The Senator John Heinz History Center**, an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution and the largest history museum in Pennsylvania, presents American history with a Western Pennsylvania connection. The Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum is a museum within a museum, comprehensively presenting the region’s remarkable sports story through hundreds of artifacts and interactive experiences for visitors of all ages. The History Center and Sports Museum are located at 1212 Smallman Street in the city’s Strip District, and are open every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The History Center’s museum system includes the Sports Museum; the Fort Pitt Museum in historic Point State Park; and Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village, a National Historic Landmark located in Avella, Pa. in Washington County. More information is available at [www.heinzhistorycenter.org](http://www.heinzhistorycenter.org).

The History Center will showcase the largest time capsule of pre-Civil War life as part of a new major exhibition, **Pittsburgh’s Lost Steamboat: Treasures of the Arabia**. (photo credit: Gary Lucy)
More than 130 years after the Arabia sank, a group of modern day treasure hunters rediscovered the Arabia buried 45 feet below a cornfield a half-mile from the Missouri River.

The Steamboat Arabia’s cargo included more than one million objects such as housing supplies, keys, nails, and other hardware bound for general stores and pioneer settlements in the West.
The 8,000 square foot exhibit explores Pittsburgh’s important role as a Gateway to the West and a national hub for the steamboat building industry in the mid-19th century.

The History Center’s *Pittsburgh’s Lost Steamboat: Treasures of the Arabia* exhibition will feature nearly 2,000 once-hidden treasures from the vast Arabia collection, including many items manufactured in Western Pa.